



Lutheran Church of the Master

Pastor David Kappus

Good News About Christ

November 22, 2009 - John 18:33-37; Revelation 1:4-6

Today I want to deal with some of the fundamentals of our faith. You may leave here saying, “Pastor, I already knew those things.” Perhaps, but I’ve learned that people can hear something many times, but not have it really connect to their lives. Besides, as we all know, communication is a tricky thing.

I heard about a disappointed soft drink salesman who returned from his assignment in the Middle East. His boss asked, “Why weren’t you successful with the Arabs?”

The salesman explained, “When I got posted in the Middle East, I was very sure to make a good sales pitch as our product was virtually unknown there. I didn’t know how to speak Arabic, so I planned to convey the message through three posters. My first poster was a man crawling through the hot desert sand, totally exhausted. In the second, the man is drinking our soft drink. In the third, the man is now totally refreshed. Then these posters were pasted all over the place.”

“That should have worked,” said the boss.

The salesman replied, “Well, yes, it should have. However, not only did I not speak Arabic but I didn’t realize that Arabs read from right to left.”

Communication is a tricky thing. I want to make sure when you leave here today that you know the fundamentals of what we believe about Christ.

On the church calendar this is the last Sunday of the year. Next Sunday is the first Sunday in Advent and so begins a new liturgical year. Today, known in many churches as Christ the King Sunday, is a relatively new festival. In the 1920s Pope Pius XI saw a Europe still reeling from World War I. He saw economic uncertainty. And he saw people willing to turn the governance of their lives over to political leaders who promised to save them. Sound familiar? So, Pius XI instituted the festival of Christ the King to assert that no human ruler is Lord but that the sovereignty of Christ extends to all time and to all space. And from that small beginning, churches all over the world are celebrating Christ the King Sunday today. It is fitting that we close the church year celebrating Christ as Lord of all.

It is also fitting to reflect on what it means for us to be starting a New Year in the life of our congregation. With Christ as our King, our Lord, where will our focus be in the year ahead? As you are completing your Race for Ministry commitments, are you asking what Jesus wants to accomplish through you in the next 12 months or are you thinking about what else you could do...or what statement you could make...with that money? You may remember...Jesus is watching. It’s not a threat...it’s simple reality. Jesus is King...Jesus is Lord...and we seem to have lost the emotional and spiritual impact of those statements.

Some of you may have seen the motion picture a few years back, *The Apostle*. Robert Duvall plays a flawed, but talented Pentecostal/holiness-type preacher. In one service he conducts a type of litany that is sort of a “Jesus cheer.” Imagine his congregation responding each time by

shouting, “Jesus!” In fact, let’s do better than that. Take off your Lutheran hats for a moment. Karen, mute my microphone...I’m not gonna need it for a minute or two. Alright, you know the correct response to each question...here we go.

“Who is the King of Kings?” “Jesus!”

“Before Abraham was, was who?” “Jesus!”

“Who is the first and the last?” “Jesus!”

“If I’m on the devil’s hit list, who is by my side?” “Jesus!”

“Who’s the Lily of the Valley?” “Jesus!”

“Yeah, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, who is by my side?” “Jesus!”

“If I wake up in heaven tomorrow morning, who do I look up to?” “Jesus!”

“Shout it out loud and say ‘Jesus!’” “Jesus!”

“I can’t hear you!” “Jesus!”

“Jesus!” “Jesus!”

“In the name of Jesus!” “Jesus!”

Whew. That’s not our style of worship, but it is kind of invigorating.

On this last Sunday of the church year we celebrate the culmination of history, when Christ shall reign over all. John in his Revelation expressed it through rich symbolism: “John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father to him be glory and power forever and ever! Amen.”

If you want to know where history is headed, there it is. Christ will one day reign over all. As St. Paul writes in Philippians 2, “Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (9-11). It is indeed a fitting way to end a church year, with Christ on the throne of the universe. There are some things that we believe about Jesus that everyone needs to know and understand.

First of all, we believe that Jesus is God incarnate. That is, if you want to understand God, all you have to do is look at Christ.

Pastor Edward Markquart once made an astute observation about a well-known study that was conducted some years back at the University of Minnesota. The study was of identical twins.

A physiologist studied identical twins in order to prove how powerful the environment was on those twins who were separated from each other at birth and had lived apart for thirty and forty years. Here is what he found. Even though separated at birth for thirty to forty years, these identical twins were still very much alike in many ways: the way they reacted to smoke, the way they crossed their legs, even the similarity of their toothpaste. The physiologist measured their galvanized skin responses using electrodes in their bodies and their reactions to stimuli were identical. They listened to symphonies and the measurements of the GSR were the same. They heard shocking noises and their brains responded just the same, even though they had been

separated from birth. The twins had the same genes; the same chromosomes. After so many years, they were still alike. Genetics beat environment.

Pastor Markquart makes this observation, “What the Bible is saying is that Jesus is identical to the Father. Christ is the same substance of the Father, the same nature. If you want to know what the Father is like, look at the genetic reproduction of the Son. There is only one.” What a great analogy. What is God like? Look at Jesus.

On one occasion the disciple Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”

Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? (John 14: 8-9)” Here is the first thing we believe about Jesus. We believe that Jesus is God incarnate.

The second thing we believe about Christ is that he is the Savior of the world. John writes in our lesson today from Revelation: “Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come . . . and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood . . .” Christ came into the world to save us “To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood . . .” We all probably know John 3:16 by heart: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son . . .” And it is a wonderful verse. But I’ve never felt it was complete without verse 17 as well: “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”

To hear many Christians talk, the chief reason Christ came was to condemn people. And if Christ won’t condemn certain people, then these Christians certainly will. They have their list of those who don’t quite measure up. Sadly the world thinks they speak for Christ. They do not. Christ even forgave those who crucified him.

There is a humorous story about a community that held an Easter pageant. Different people in the community played the various characters. Jesus’ character was played by a big, burly oil-field worker, primarily because he was the only one strong enough to carry the heavy wooden beam that was to be Jesus’ cross.

As they came to the part in which Jesus was being led away to be crucified, a little man who was simply part of the jeering crowd got caught up in the emotion of the moment. He joined in the shouts of “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” As the man playing Jesus was being led away, carrying the cross upon his back, he had to walk right in front of this little man who was still shouting at the top of his lungs. The little man was so consumed by the moment that he actually spit on Jesus. Suddenly everything came to a shocked standstill. The big, burly oil-field worker stopped, wiped his face dry, looked at the little man, and uttered the most memorable line in the entire play: “I’ll be back to take care of you after the Resurrection!”

Well, that is a very human response to being spit upon, but it was not Jesus’ response. Here is where the Divine side of Christ shines brightest. He forgave his enemies, those who cursed him,

spit upon him, drove nails through his hands. Surely someone who could do that can forgive you and me. Jesus came to save and not to condemn.

There may be someone here today who feels condemned. Maybe you've been through a divorce. Maybe you've betrayed your spouse. Maybe, secretly, you've been nurturing an addiction. There are many, many reasons people feel condemned...condemned by others, condemned by Christ.

Max Lucado describes a visit he made to Brazil to see the famous Christ the Redeemer statue that overlooks the city of Rio de Janeiro. This statue is 90 feet tall. It is positioned on a mountain a mile and one-half above sea level.

Lucado says that the first thing he noticed about the statue is that it had "blind eyes." That is, there were no pupils to suggest vision, no circles to suggest sight, only what Lucado calls "Little Orphan Annie" openings. Lucado says he could not help but be staggered by the unintended symbolism. "What kind of redeemer is this?" he asked. "Heart made of stone? Held together not with passion and love, but by concrete and mortar. What kind of redeemer is this? Blind eyes and stony heart?"

Then, he remembered the prostitute that was thrown at Jesus' feet by a group of self-righteous men, rocks in their hands, ready to apply the law and stone her to death. The familiar story ends with Jesus saying that whoever is without sin can throw the first stone. Since there was no one fit to condemn her, neither would he condemn her. (John 8:1-11) She is told by Jesus to "Go and sin no more." This woman, so dramatically saved, is not heard from again, but, doubtless, she could not forget Jesus.

Lucado imagines that if she were transported to Rio to look at the concrete and steel Christ the Redeemer, she would say, "That's not the Jesus I saw." But somehow transport her to Calvary and let her stand at the base of the cross and she would say: "That's him." She would recognize his hands. The only hands that had held no stones that day were his. And on this day they still held no stones. She would recognize his voice. It's raspier and weaker, but the words are the same, "Father, forgive them . . ."

And she would recognize his eyes. How could she ever forget those eyes? Clear and tear filled. Eyes that saw her not as she was, but as she was intended to be.

We blaspheme Christ when we condemn others in Christ's name. He did not come to condemn. He came to save. He is the Savior of the world. My dear brothers and sisters, if you brought in a feeling of condemnation this day, leave it at Christ's feet. This is what we believe: Christ is God incarnate. He is not our condemner, but our Savior.

But there is one thing more to be said. Listen to the rest of that verse from Revelation: "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father to him be glory and power forever and ever! Amen." Christ has called us to be a "kingdom" and "priests to serve his God and Father." What does that mean?

Part of the reason Christ came into the world was to establish a group of people who would serve him in the world. John calls them "a kingdom" and "priests to serve his God and Father . . ." My friends, he's talking about us, you and me. We have an important role in Christ's work. He has

entrusted to us the continuing work of telling the world the Good News that God is not a God of condemnation, but of salvation.

I love the way writer Philip Yancey once put it. He lives in Colorado and loves to climb the mountains there. He says that on a summer weekend in the mountains, he sees casual hikers who have no idea what they are doing. In sandals, shorts, and t-shirts, carrying a single container of water, they start up a trail at mid-morning. They have no map, no compass, no raingear and no clue. They also have no apparent knowledge of the lightning storms that roll in many summer afternoons, making it imperative to summit before noon and head for the safety of the timberline.

A neighbor of Yancey's, who volunteers for Alpine Rescue, has told him hair-raising stories of tourists who must be rescued from certain death after wandering off a trail, falling, or simply being exposed to a sudden hailstorm or thirty degree drop in temperature. Nevertheless, regardless of the circumstances, Alpine Rescue always responds to a call for help. Not once, says Yancey, have they lectured a hapless tourist, "Well, since you obviously ignored the most basic rules of the wilderness, you'll just have to sit here and bear the consequences. We won't assist you."

Their mission is rescue, and so they pursue every needy hiker in the wilderness, no matter how undeserving. A whistle, a cry, a flashing mirror, a bonfire, an "SOS" spelled out in pine branches, a message of distress from a cell phone...any of these signals will cause Alpine Rescue to mobilize teams of medically trained searchers.

Philip Yancey writes, "I have come to see the central message of the Bible, too, as one of rescue. In the book of Romans, Paul takes pains to point out that none of us 'deserve' God's mercy and none of us can save ourselves. Like a stranded hiker, all we can do is call for help."

Do you understand that God calls this congregation to be a "rescue team"? That is who we are and what we are about. Jesus is God incarnate. Jesus came not to condemn, but to save. And we are those who are called to serve as Christ's rescue team, to seek and save all those who need to hear the redeeming words of the Gospel of grace, following the example of our Lord and King.

And so we celebrate Christ's reign over the world...again. And we are given another chance to make it real in our lives. Follow Jesus...serve the King.

"Who is the King of Kings?!" "Jesus!"

Amen.